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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TAIPEI 004477

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT PASS AIT/W

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SUBJECT: PRE-ELECTION SCENESSETTER: TAITUNG COUNTY/THE HORSE RACE

REF: TAIPEI 4158

Classified By: AIT ACTING DIRECTOR DAVID J.

KEEGAN, REASON(S): 1.4 (B/D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. TAITUNG COUNTY IS HAVING THE ULTIMATE LOCAL TAIWAN ELECTION (REFTEL). NEITHER CANDIDATE IS ENDORSED BY A MAJOR PARTY. BOTH ARE BEDEVILED BY ACCUSATIONS OF CORRUPTION. NOTHING COULD HAVE SEEMED MORE NATURAL TO LOCALS. WHILE THE KMT HAS A STRONG HOLD IN TAITUNG, PARTY-AFFILIATION IS HARDLY WORTH A MENTION IN THE MUD-SLINGING AND BACKROOM BETTING CURRENTLY IN PLAY. WHILE THE ODDS ARE NOT YET SET, BOOKIES ARE LEANING TOWARD A WIN BY KMT-MEMBER WU CHUN-LI, AND NO ONE SEEMS CONCERNED THAT HIS RECENT SIXTEEN YEAR SENTENCE FOR CORRUPTION MIGHT HINDER HIS CHANCES OR EVEN KEEP HIM FROM SERVING AS MAGISTRATE IF ELECTED. THE INCUMBENT DPP MAGISTRATE HSU CHING-YUAN HAS SET THE TONE FOR HIS PROTEGE'S, THE INDEPENDENT CANDIDATE (DPP-MEMBER) LIU CHAO-HAO'S, CAMPAIGN BY PUBLICLY AIRING EVERY PIECE OF DIRTY LAUNDRY IN CANDIDATE WU'S CLOSET ONLY TO FIND THE PUBLIC MORE INTERESTED IN WHY MAGISTRATE HSU HIMSELF DROPPED OUT OF THE RACE. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) WITH THE NOTABLE EXCEPTION OF INCUMBENT MAGISTRATE HSU CHING-YUAN, WHO DECRINED THE DPP AS "STUPID AND INCAPABLE" AND THE KMT AS "LOUSY AND CORRUPT," MOST PEOPLE IN TAITUNG EXPRESS LESS INTEREST IN PARTY POLITICS THAN THEY DO IN WHY THE INCUMBENT FIRST-TERM MAGISTRATE ISN'T RUNNING FOR RE-ELECTION. MAGISTRATE HSU'S HISTORY SHOWS A MAN OF THE RAINBOW -- GREEN, BLUE AND COLORS IN-BETWEEN. ORIGINALLY A KMT MEMBER WHO WAS ELECTED ON AN INDEPENDENT TICKET TO HIS CURRENT OFFICE, HSU LATER BECAME A DPP MEMBER WHILE IN OFFICE. HSU TOLD AIT/K THAT DESPITE HIS MANY ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO IMPROVE TAITUNG'S STANDARD OF LIVING IN ART, CULTURE AND EDUCATION, HIS GENERAL "DISAPPOINTMENT" WITH POLITICS AND POLITICAL PARTIES LED HIM NOT TO SEEK RE-ELECTION, A STORY MOST IN TAITUNG SERIOUSLY DOUBT.

¶3. (C) HSU, A STRAIGHTFORWARD AND EXCITABLE PERSON, PRAISED HIS DEPUTY MAGISTRATE, INDEPENDENT CANDIDATE LIU CHAO-HAO, AS FAR MORE CAPABLE, INTELLIGENT AND HARDWORKING THAN HIMSELF. A LAWYER AND FORMER JUDGE FOR SIX YEARS IN THE TAITUNG DISTRICT COURT, LIU IS YOUNG, "CLEAN" AND HAS FOUR STRONG YEARS OF EXPERIENCE NOW AS A DEPUTY MAGISTRATE, SAYS HSU. ON THE OTHER HAND, HSU NOTED TO AIT/K THE SAME THING HE HAS NOTED DAILY FOR NEWSPAPERS AND TELEVISION REPORTERS: INDEPENDENT CANDIDATE WU CHUN-LI IS A "LOUSY" MAN WHO HAS BEEN SENTENCED TO SIXTEEN YEARS IN PRISON FOR CORRUPTION. HSU CALLED WU "A GAMBLER" SAYING THAT WU "EVEN GAMBLES IN HIS OFFICE." AS SUCH, HSU CHARACTERIZED THIS ELECTION AS A BATTLE BETWEEN "JUDGE AND HOODLUM."

¶4. (C) UNFORTUNATELY, SAID HSU, THERE IS NO QUESTION THAT THE KMT HAS THE STRONGER HAND IN TAITUNG. WHILE HE KNOWS KMT CHAIRMAN MA YING-JEOU WON'T BE COMING DOWN TO SUPPORT WU'S CAMPAIGN, HE CAUTIONED AIT/K NOT TO BE FOOLED BY WU'S STATUS AS AN INDEPENDENT. "JUST GO TO THE KMT OFFICE," HE SAID, "AND YOU'LL SEE EVERY ONE OVER THERE BUSY TO DEATH SUPPORTING HIM." IN AN ASIDE, HE ALSO TOLD AIT/K NOT TO EVEN FACTOR IN INDEPENDENT CANDIDATE PENG, A PROFESSOR AT TAITUNG UNIVERSITY, BECAUSE "HE IS A NUT AND HIS OWN FAMILY WOULDN'T VOTE FOR HIM." WHEN PENG RAN IN THE LAST MAGISTERIAL ELECTION HE RECEIVED ONLY 500 VOTES.

¶5. (C) ANOTHER STRAIGHT TALKER, KMT'S COUNTY CHAIRMAN CHOU HSI-FANG, CUT RIGHT TO THE CHASE. IF MAGISTRATE HSU ISN'T INTERESTED IN RUNNING, ASKED CHOU, "THEN WHY DID HE APPROACH THE KMT IN MAY AND ASK IF HE COULD RUN UNDER OUR BANNER? WE ALL KNOW THE PUBLIC WOULD GIVE HIM STRONG SUPPORT, SO WHY ISN'T HE RUNNING?" THE KMT, SAYS CHOU, REFUSED TO BRING MAGISTRATE HSU BACK INTO THE FOLD BECAUSE HE SUPPORTED A DPP CANDIDATE IN THE LAST LEGISLATIVE YUAN ELECTION AND THAT HAS ALIENATED A LOT OF POTENTIAL KMT SUPPORTERS FROM HSU. FURTHER, HSU'S ADMINISTRATIVE AIDES HAVE BEEN BLEEDING AWAY FROM APPOINTMENTS IN THE COUNTY GOVERNMENT FOR THE LAST THREE YEARS, CLAIMS CHOU, AND EACH ONE OF THEM HAS BROUGHT FORTH FURTHER DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE OUT OF HSU'S "CORRUPT" ADMINISTRATION AND HANDED IT OVER TO THE KMT. CHAIRMAN CHOU TOLD AIT/K THE BOTTOM LINE IS THAT, ALTHOUGH HSU IS BUSY CONDEMNING WU AS A HOODLUM AND GAMBLER, THE TRUTH IS THAT HSU HIMSELF IS "JUST LIKE WU BECAUSE THEY ARE BOTH GAMBLERS."

HSU, SAYS CHOU, HAS FIGURED HIS ODDS OF WINNING AND THEY ARE NO BETTER THAN 50/50, SO HE'S PULLED OUT OF THE RACE TO SAVE HIMSELF FROM EXPOSURE TO THE FILTH HIS FORMER AIDES HAVE PROVIDED THE KMT TO THROW AT HIM IF HE RUNS.

16. (C) AS FAR AS THE KMT IS CONCERNED, THE MUD-SLINGING HAS ALREADY STARTED GIVEN MAGISTRATE HSU'S DAILY RANTS AGAINST CANDIDATE WU. SO, EVEN THOUGH HSU ISN'T RUNNING, WU'S UNOFFICIAL KMT SUPPORTERS INTEND TO THROW SOMETHING SOON AT LIU, WHO AFTER SERVING FOR FOUR YEARS UNDER HSU MUST BE GUILTY BY ASSOCIATION, CHOU NOTED. WHAT THE KMT, HOWEVER, WILL BE SLINGING IS NOT MUD, BUT GRAVEL. WITH CANDIDATE WU SHOWING IN LOCAL KMT POLLS AS AHEAD BY 5%, THE KMT HOPES TO TURN GREEN-LEANING OR UNDECIDED VOTERS TOWARD WU BY SHOWING THAT HSU, AND HIS DEPUTY, ALLOWED EXCESSIVE AMOUNTS OF GRAVEL TO BE SHIPPED OUT OF TAITUNG COUNTY TO TAIWAN'S EAST COAST. UP TO 1,007 TRUCKS IN ONE DAY CARRIED GRAVEL OUT OF TAITUNG, CLAIMS TAITUNG CITY COUNCILOR CHEN HSIEN-HSING. WITHOUT A THOUGHT AS TO THE COUNTY'S OWN NEEDS, THE SHIPMENT OF SUCH LARGE AMOUNTS OF GRAVEL FOR AN EXTENDED PERIOD OF TIME, SAYS KMT OFFICIALS, CERTAINLY SMACKS OF CORRUPTION. KMT'S CHAIRMAN CHOU IMPLIES THEY HAVE THE DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE TO PROVE IT.

17. (C) WHEN AIT/K ASKED IF WU CHUN-LI'S RECENT SIXTEEN-YEAR CONVICTION FOR CORRUPTION CERTAINLY WOULD NOT BE AN OBSTACLE TO RUNNING AN EFFECTIVE CAMPAIGN, THE KMT'S TAITUNG CHAIRMAN CHOU LAUGHED IT OFF AS MERELY A "MATTER OF LAW." IN FACT, SAID CHOU, CANDIDATE LIU AND HIS CHIEF SUPPORTER MAGISTRATE HSU ARE USING THIS "EXAGGERATED INTERPRETATION OF THE LAW" AND REPEATEDLY RAISING THE LOWER COURT CONVICTION AS A "CAMPAIGN TACTIC" TO SCARE VOTERS AWAY FROM VOTING FOR WU. THE LAW, CHOU SAYS, FORCES A CONVICTED INCUMBENT TO STEP DOWN. A CONVICTED CANDIDATE, ON THE OTHER HAND, CAN BE ELECTED AND STILL SIT IN OFFICE DURING HIS APPEAL. IF CONVICTED ON APPEAL WITHIN THE FIRST TWO YEARS AS MAGISTRATE, WU WOULD BE SUSPENDED FROM HIS OFFICE AND A BY-ELECTION WOULD BE HELD. HOWEVER, WU COULD THEN RUN IN THE BY-ELECTION BECAUSE HE STILL HAS ONE APPEAL REMAINING. IF HE WOULD WIN THE BY-ELECTION, CLAIMS CHOU, THEN HE CANNOT BE REMOVED FROM THE SAME POST FOR THE SAME CRIMINAL CONVICTION. IF, HOWEVER, WU WAS CONVICTED ON APPEAL IN THE LAST TWO YEARS OF HIS TENURE AS A MAGISTRATE, HE WOULD BE SUSPENDED FROM POST AND THE INTERIOR MINISTRY WOULD ASSIGN AN ACTING OFFICIAL. LUCKILY, CHOU NOTED, IF THAT WERE TO HAPPEN WU STILL WOULD HAVE ONE MORE APPEAL TO THE HIGHEST COURT BEFORE HE ACTUALLY HAS TO SERVE ANY TIME. AS SUCH, THE KMT EXPECTS THAT WU WILL BE ABLE TO HOLD THE MAGISTERIAL POST FOR A FULL FOUR YEARS.

18. (C) LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS, WHO ACTUALLY SEIZED EVIDENCE IN THE CASE AGAINST CANDIDATE WU, TOLD AIT/K THAT THE PROSECUTORS WERE A LITTLE MORE STRICT IN THEIR INTERPRETATION OF THE EVIDENCE THAN WERE THE POLICE. IN FACT, FOREIGN AFFAIRS POLICE SECTION CHIEF CHEN FU-SHEN AGREES WITH CANDIDATE WU'S WIFE THAT THERE IS LITTLE CHANCE WU WILL BE CONVICTED AND SENTENCED DURING THE APPEAL BECAUSE "THERE IS JUST NOT ENOUGH EVIDENCE AGAINST HIM."

19. (C) A VISIT TO THE DPP OFFICE RESULTED IN A FLAT OUT DENIAL THAT INDEPENDENT CANDIDATE LIU WILL RECEIVE ANY SUPPORT FROM THE PARTY. TAITUNG COUNTY'S DPP CHAIRMAN CHANG CHIA-CHANG STATED THAT LIU DIDN'T GO THROUGH THE PRIMARY, IS NOT THEIR OFFICIAL CANDIDATE, NO ONE FROM THE CENTRAL OFFICE HAS NOTIFIED THEM TO SUPPORT HIM, AND THERE WILL BE NO LOCAL DPP OFFICIAL CAMPAIGN SUPPORT FOR HIM. (NOTE: ALTHOUGH A DPP MEMBER, LIU COULD NOT BE NOMINATED TO THE RACE AS AN OFFICIAL DPP CANDIDATE BECAUSE HSU'S REFUSAL TO RENOUNCE AUTHORITATIVELY HIS RE-ELECTION PLANS KEPT LIU OUT OF THE DPP PRIMARY PROCESS). BEYOND THAT, CHAIRMAN CHANG HAD NOTHING LEFT TO SAY ABOUT THE MAGISTERIAL RACE. INSTEAD, HE PROCEEDED TO RAIL AGAINST THE KMT FOR ITS ONGOING PUSH IN THE LY TO DEFEAT THE ARMS PROCUREMENT BILL.

10. (C) TAITUNG POLITICAL OBSERVERS SAY NO ONE CANDIDATE HAS CONTROL OF THE "PARTY SUPPORTERS" FROM ANY CAMP. MAGISTRATE HSU'S BASE OF SUPPORT IN TAITUNG HAS ALWAYS BEEN BLUE. HIS SWITCH FROM BLUE TO GREEN AND HIS SUPPORT OF GREEN CANDIDATES, SAYS KMT CHAIRMAN CHOU, HAS ONLY SERVED TO CONFUSE LOCAL PEOPLE, THUS THE BLUE SUPPORT FOR HSU COULD HAVE TRANSLATED INTO A RE-ELECTION, BUT WILL NEVER TRANSFER FULLY TO INDEPENDENT CANDIDATE LIU.

11. (C) BESIDES HIS PARTY AFFILIATION, LIU HAS SKELETONS IN HIS CLOSET THAT ALIENATE VOTERS OF BOTH COLORS FROM HIM. IN ADDITION TO A MOTHER CURRENTLY PUBLICLY EMBROILED IN A FINANCIAL DISPUTE BECAUSE OF HER GAMBLING IN AN ILLEGAL LOTTERY, LIU ALSO HAS A BROTHER WITH A WELL-KNOWN HISTORY OF FINANCIAL PROBLEMS.

12. (C) FORMER TAITUNG POLITICIAN AND LONG-TIME AIT/K CONTACT CHEN YI-SHAN FURTHER NOTED THAT CANDIDATE LIU'S WIFE HAS AN ALOOF AND SUPERIOR ATTITUDE. MAGISTRATE HSU HAS BROUGHT HIS OWN WIFE, KNOWN AS A "NATURAL" AT CAMPAIGNING GIVEN HER ABILITY TO DRINK AND GOSSIP, BACK FROM CANADA TO CAMPAIGN FOR LIU. ACCORDING TO CHEN, CANDIDATE WU IS IN A SIMILAR BOAT BECAUSE HIS SUPPORT IS BOTH GREEN AND BLUE ALSO. THE

DIFFERENCE FOR WU, SAYS CHEN, IS THAT HE'S AN AGREEABLE FELLOW AND EVERYONE LIKES HIM.

¶13. (C) TAITUNG POLICE SAY THEY ARE AMUSED THAT LOCAL BOOKIES ARE SCRAMBLING TRYING TO FIX ODDS ON THE ELECTION. IN FACT, POLICE SAY, THE BIGGEST BUSINESS ENTERPRISE IN NOVEMBER IN TAITUNG COUNTY WILL BE BETTING ON THIS MAGISTERIAL RACE. FOREIGN AFFAIRS POLICEMAN "ROY" LO QUIPPED THAT WITH BOTH CANDIDATES HOLDING SUPPORTERS FROM BOTH BLUE AND GREEN SIDES OF THE FENCE, IT IS ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO PREDICT THE OUTCOME OF THIS RACE, WHICH, OF COURSE, IS WHAT MAKES IT ALL SUCH AN INTERESTING THING ON WHICH TO WAGER. LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS ASSURED AIT/K THEY WOULD KEEP US APPRISED ON HOW THE BETTING IS GOING.

¶14. (C) COMMENT: THIS IS NOT AN ELECTION -- IT'S A HORSE RACE. NOT ONE PERSON VISITED BY AIT/K FAILED TO MENTION GAMBLING AND ITS CONNECTION TO THIS MAGISTERIAL ELECTION. WHETHER IT WAS A CANDIDATE'S PENCHANT FOR GAMBLING, FAMILY GAMBLING DEBTS, CONVICTIONS FOR GAMBLING, BOOKIES FIXING ODDS OR VOTERS MAKING BOOK, TAITUNG CAN'T SEEM TO SEPARATE ITSELF FROM THE REAL THRILL, FOR THEM, OF THIS RACE. THE MORE EXCITING THE RACE (AND THIS ONE IS EXCITING) THE MORE RISKY THE BETS AND THE HIGHER THE STAKES. CLEARLY, KMT CHAIRMAN MA YING-JEOU ISN'T DROPPING IN TO CAMPAIGN FOR A KMT MEMBER CONVICTED OF CORRUPTION. THE DPP DENIES THEY EVEN HAVE A CANDIDATE TO SUPPORT IN TAITUNG, SO THERE'S NO PARTY ACTIVITY GOING ON THERE. WHAT WE WILL SEE IN TAITUNG IS LOCAL POLITICS WITH LOCAL ISSUES, LOCAL PERSONALITIES, AND LOCAL SKELETONS. AIT/K WAS UNABLE TO FIND ANY HORSE CARRYING A NATIONAL ISSUE OR CONCERN ON WHICH TO PLACE A BET ON DOWN IN TAITUNG. END COMMENT

Keegan